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LETTER DATED 4 JUNE 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of a statement by His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, on the aggression carried out by the State of Eritrea on Ethiopia to the sixty-eighth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Intervention by H.E. Ato Seyoum Mesfin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on the aggression carried out by the State of Eritrea on Ethiopia to the sixty-eighth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity

I wanted to take the floor because I felt it necessary to brief my colleagues and the Council of Ministers on the very sad recent development in the relations between Ethiopia and the State of Eritrea - a crisis which began with the aggression carried out by the Eritrean authorities against Ethiopia.

Before I proceed further, however, I feel it is my obligation to express my Government's appreciation to the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity and to all those who have tried, under very difficult circumstances, to make their good offices available to ensure the peaceful resolution of the crisis by trying to put some sense into the minds of the Eritrean leadership to withdraw from two localities in north-west Ethiopia, namely Badme and part of Shiraro, which Eritrean troops occupied on 12 May 1998 by deploying three brigades accompanied by tanks; all this to invade part of our country defended only by local militia and police. Thus the absurdity behind the present Eritrean demand that the area be demilitarized after having invaded part of our country which, for all intents and purposes, is already demilitarized.

This Council and the international community as a whole know perfectly well how Ethiopia has made all the necessary efforts to maintain friendship and close ties with Eritrea. No one in his right mind could contest the fact that Ethiopia gave full cooperation to the people of Eritrea in their efforts to exercise their self-determination, up to the internationally supervised referendum, and beyond.

The Eritrean aggression is totally inexplicable. There were, no doubt, and there are, border disputes between us. But we had agreed to resolve this peacefully and we had set up a Joint Commission for this purpose. In fact, the Joint Commission, the Eritrean party having been led by its Defence Minister, was meeting in Addis Ababa only a few days prior to the Eritrean aggression against Ethiopia. One of the issues discussed at this meeting was an incident which took place on 6 May inside Ethiopian territory whereby armed Eritreans had a scuffle with Ethiopian local police and militia whose only request was that the Eritreans leave their arms before proceeding to town or return across the border and deposit their weapons there and re-enter Ethiopian territory, as they should have done in the first instance. Even though the two countries had agreements on the free movement of their citizens, entering the sovereign territory of another country with arms was naturally bizarre.

At the Joint Commission meeting referred to earlier, there was an agreement between the two sides, among other things, that the Eritrean authorities would ensure the withdrawal of their armed contingents. But instead, and while Ethiopia was awaiting the implementation of the understanding reached, a

decision was made by the Eritrean authorities to launch the unprovoked and naked aggression against Ethiopia of 12 May.

Ethiopia did not respond immediately to this aggression launched against its territory, as it could have done, preferring instead to exercise patience in the hope that reason would prevail in Asmara and that the armed contingents would withdraw from Ethiopian territory peacefully, following which the dispute could be settled in a civilized manner, either through bilateral negotiation or through the involvement of a third party.

That was the essence of the position taken by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity in a statement endorsed by our Parliament, issued on 13 May 1998, which called on the Eritrean authorities to withdraw from Ethiopian territory unconditionally, failing which Ethiopia would exercise its right to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Ethiopia had made it clear that negotiations would not and could not commence on the outstanding dispute between us unless Eritrea withdraws its troops from Ethiopian territory and from the two localities that have never been part of Eritrea, either during the time of Italian colonialism or since. Ethiopia has absolutely no doubt that those localities claimed by Eritrea are Ethiopian. Ethiopia has nonetheless no problem with ascertaining its legitimate claim at any forum under whatever format. But Ethiopia cannot allow Eritrea to create facts on the ground through invasion and then call on Ethiopia to sit down for discussion. Nobody should be allowed to violate international law and then be rewarded for it. Ethiopia has a responsibility for standing its ground when international law is violated so flagrantly and so blatantly. I submit that all of us have a responsibility in this regard. This kind of behaviour cannot and should not be tolerated. All the more so, Mr. Chairman, by Africa, which has good reason for being seriously concerned about the kind of behaviour that continues to be demonstrated by Eritrea.

This aggression unleashed by Eritrea on Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity reflects Eritrea's absolute disregard for international law and for civilized behaviour. It forms a pattern of behaviour that Eritrea appears to have been used to and which it seems determined to continue, even in its relations with those with whom it maintained the closest of relations. There has been no closer friend to Eritrea than Ethiopia. When Eritrea does what it did to Ethiopia, then it becomes clear that for Eritrea not only international law but also friendship has no meaning. Trust has no meaning for Eritrea and mutual confidence has no place in Eritrea's relations with others.

It should not be overlooked, Mr. Chairman, that neither has Eritrea ever shown respect for the Organization of African Unity, but instead, true to the pattern of behaviour that has become the hallmark of the Eritrean leadership, it has been with absolute disdain that Eritrea has been treating the Organization of African Unity. This is something that is not usually talked about in public out of decency and in the belief that time and experience would temper Eritrea's arrogance and lack of civility. But Eritrea's arrogance and its disdain for Africa, its absolute disregard of international law and of all principles governing inter-State relations has now reached a stage where Eritrea has become

not only a source of shame for Africa and for its neighbours but also a menace to peace.

I wish to make a few points clearer to the august Council. Ethiopia has absolutely no desire to go to war with Eritrea. It has no claim over an inch of Eritrean territory. Moreover, if Eritrea has claims over Ethiopian territory, Ethiopia is willing to talk about these claims following Eritrea's unconditional withdrawal of its troops from Ethiopian territory. But I have no doubt that Africa would not, even for a moment, think it would be proper to reward aggression, which is what Eritrea wants. Unless Eritrea is stopped now and is told by Africa that enough is enough, there can be no end to what Eritrea will continue to do. If today it is Ethiopia, then who would be next? I pose this question with all seriousness and after close observation of Eritrea's pattern of behaviour over the past years, which has now come to haunt Ethiopia and our subregion.

Following the African tradition, Ethiopia has continued to show maximum restraint in the face of this Eritrean aggression. Even though our country was invaded and our territory was occupied, we refused to respond in kind. We agreed to use the good offices of friendly countries, including the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, Rwanda and the United States of America. The latter two countries have continued to do the maximum possible to resolve the problem through their facilitation.

But even as these efforts have been under way, Eritrea has continued with provocative activities, with the intention of creating yet other facts on the ground by occupying yet other Ethiopian localities. This was done on 31 May 1998, through attacks on Ethiopian localities of Aiga and Aliteina, and on 3 June 1998 on Zala Ambasa, Aiga and Aliteina, all of which failed. But when Eritrean aggression is foiled, its prevarication takes its place with the intention of hoodwinking the international community. Eritrea says that Ethiopia has carried out aggression against Eritrea. This is pure and simple fabrication. In any case, when in history have aggressors admitted their deeds?

The truth is that Ethiopia has continued to cooperate with the facilitators because of its keen interest in giving peace a chance. Our hope is that Eritrea would do likewise.

But it is unlikely that Eritrea would allow the efforts of the facilitators to succeed, because Eritrea does not appear to see benefit in peace and stability. For reasons that are known only to the authorities in Eritrea, they seem to believe that somehow they would benefit by disturbing Ethiopia's peace, by throwing Ethiopia off balance and by making Ethiopia divert its attention away from development. They will not succeed; and Africa should not allow Eritrea to continue misbehaving and to continue posing a threat to peace and stability in our subregion and in Africa. The minimum that members of our Organization should tell the authorities in Eritrea, individually and, if necessary, collectively, is that it is not right and it is a danger for Africa for African States to invade others and create facts on the ground and then, after having created a fait accompli, to invite the invaded country for talks. This is dangerous, and if we happen to have two or three countries that behave

like Eritrea, then we might as well kiss African unity goodbye, and peace in our continent would be an illusion.

Our commitment to the prevention of conflict in our continent is being tested by Eritrea's pattern of behaviour. Our sense of African decency is being abused by a State which has no decency and by authorities who seem to feel glory comes only in war and that peace has no rewards. Africa should tell the Eritrean authorities that this is not the African view and that Africa has no time for conflicts, whether inter-State or intra-State. At the minimum, the Eritrean authorities should be asked by Africa, individually and collectively, to cooperate with those who have already made their good offices available to both countries. In this regard, let me make it unambiguously clear that Ethiopia has accepted the proposal submitted to both of us by the facilitators. Let Eritrea do likewise. This is the test of one's commitment to peace. The proposal is submitted by common friends, therefore there cannot be any alibi, and Eritrea cannot hide behind flimsy excuses. The Organization of African Unity and this Council should also discharge its responsibilities and ask Eritrea to cooperate with the facilitators by accepting their proposal.

All those involved with Ethiopia know that Ethiopia's cooperation has always been full and unambiguous. The bottom line for Ethiopia is that aggression cannot be rewarded. Ethiopia takes this position not only because this is dictated by Ethiopia's dignity, but also because it is dangerous to reward aggression. It is dangerous for Ethiopia and it is dangerous for Africa. Enough is enough is what the Eritreans should be told. Nothing less would suffice.